



## Carlos Saura: The Political Development of Individual Consciousness

Marsha Kinder

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 3. (Spring, 1979), pp. 14-25.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0015-1386%28197921%2932%3A3%3C14%3ACSTPDO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V>

*Film Quarterly* is currently published by University of California Press.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

*The Postman Always Rings Twice* by Tay Garnett, based on the book by James Cain. What is fantastic is that they found Cain's book at the guy's house. That is, he was really inspired by the book. And since James Hadley Chase borrowed it from Cain and Verneuil adapted Chase's novel, that explains it . . .

*To conclude, how did you construct the street-car scene in La Rupture?*

It's for this scene that I made the film, just about. A woman recounts her life—where can she do it? In a streetcar. This is why we had to shoot the film in Brussels, because there are more streetcars there. I was also lucky. The route I chose was ideal, and it was by chance—it was like in Murnau, passing from the city to the

country. I was lucky that in a given moment between shots I looked forward and saw the reflection of the conductor's hand in the window, and I thought: "This is too beautiful! I don't believe it!" This is the sort of thing that you don't rationalize at the time—it is based entirely on sensations. Also, you couldn't disturb the actress—she had changed the text quite a bit, changed the story of her life, but I didn't care because it was good. Stéphane respects the text and the dialogues, but the minute she has a monologue, she changes everything. It's very strange, but it's not serious . . . So, in all my films I put little things like that in order to see what she's going to tell me, because I never know what it will be.

MARSHA KINDER

## Carlos Saura: The Political Development of Individual Consciousness

After Luis Buñuel, Carlos Saura is the most brilliant and highly acclaimed film-maker to come out of Spain. Yet few of his twelve features have been seen in the United States—*La Caza* (*The Hunt*) 1965; *El Jardín de los Delicias* (*The Garden of Delights*), 1970; *La Prima Angélica* (*Cousin Angelica*), 1973; and *Cría Cuervos* (*Raise Ravens*), 1975—and of these, only *Cría Cuervos* has been widely distributed, proving successful in Spain, France, Belgium, Japan, and the US. Nevertheless, Saura's latest films—*Elisa, Vida Mía* (*Elisa, My Life*), 1977, and *Los Ojos Vendados* (*Blindfolded Eyes*), 1978—have not yet been scheduled for distribution in this country. One would expect better exposure for such a major figure, especially now that Franco is dead and since the New Spanish Cinema has recently been generating enthusiasm at international festivals all over the world, not only for the works

of Saura, but also for Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón's *¡Habla Mudita!* (*Mute Speech*), 1973, and *Camada Negra* (*Black Brood*), 1977; José Luis Borau's *Furtivos* (*Poachers*), 1975; Jaime Chavarrí's *El Desencanto* (*The Disenchanted*), 1976, and *A Un Dios Desconocido* (*To an Unknown God*), 1977; and Victor Erice's *Espíritu de la Colmena* (*Spirit of the Beehive*), 1974.

Apparently the American distribution of these films has been held up by US economics rather than Spanish politics. Saura claims: "It is very difficult for small films to get distribution in this country. We have no control over advertising or the choice of theaters. Even when a foreign movie is an economic success in the US, the money rarely reaches Spain. It's a disaster! . . . Nevertheless, I am still interested in having my films distributed in the USA." (1)<sup>1</sup>

Saura was recently in Los Angeles for a



*Ana and her dead father: CRIA CUERVOS*

UNESCO five-day symposium on "Cinema and Society," which brought 13 noted international film-makers to the American Film Institute to discuss the social and political impact of cinema on twentieth-century culture.<sup>3</sup> As part of the program, there was a free public screening of one film by each visiting participant followed by a discussion with the film-maker.

Saura was an excellent choice for the conference since he represents a country that has recently undergone a dramatic political change that will undoubtedly be reflected in its cinema. Unlike earlier artists such as Buñuel, Picasso, and Casals, who chose to leave Fascist Spain, Saura (born in 1932) belongs to the generation that grew up under Francoism, and the theme of the Spanish Civil War was obsessive in his work and life. Although one would expect that the lifting of political censorship since the death of

Franco in November 1975 would lead to a new surge of political films or a renaissance of the New Spanish Cinema, Saura claims the situation is far more complicated: "It is my personal opinion that the New Spanish Cinema does not exist. What does exist is a number of individuals who make films. I don't know what this label refers to—is it Buñuel?, is it me and Chavarri? Of course, there are several magnificent directors who are working now in Spain, but I think it's wrong to generalize. For me, the individual works come first, then the culture." (I)

Acknowledging that a group of individuals may be influenced in similar ways by social-political events, Saura suggests that sometimes repression can be a stimulus to create: "For me and my compatriots, to make the stories we wanted to do, we had to use indirect methods. For ex-

ample, we couldn't use a linear structure or the ideas would be too clear. It often forced me to exercise my imagination. The same was true in the Golden Age of Spain when artists like Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca, and Lope de Vega had to avoid the repression of the Inquisition." (S) Franco's repression stimulated, not only artistic inventiveness, but also moral commitment. "For many years under Francoism, all of us who made movies and painted and wrote were searching for a way to make our medium more effective, not only at the personal level, but also at the level of Spanish society. I believe that when Franco was still alive, I had a moral obligation—maybe more for myself than for society—to do everything that was possible within my form of work to help change the political system as quickly as possible. That was in no way an imposition on me as an individual, for I was living in a repressive society that did not allow me to express many of the things I wanted to express." (I)

Although he now expects to have greater freedom of expression, Saura wants to use it to develop a more personal rather than a political cinema. In a recent interview, he observed: "When I began making films in the late fifties, I sometimes felt myself a spokesman for ideas which were only partially my own. Now, after eleven films, I feel I speak for myself."

Saura is proud to be called an *auteur*. "Making movies is part of my life—it's not merely a profession or work. I write my own scripts and have never adapted a novel or play. I consider myself an *auteur*." (I) It does not disturb him that his personal films might not reach a mass audience. "I think it's dangerous to set out to make a film for the masses. It seems to me more interesting to do what you want to do. I think the most wonderful thing is to have receptive people in the audience interpret what you have done. At the moment, it may only be one person, but later it might be 50,000, and some day millions. When a film has a large audience, there is a better chance of reaching more receptive individuals and that's always very satisfying. But I think the most important thing is to do what you must do and that's the only way it's possible to find this kind of communication." (I)

To do a thorough job of interpreting his works,

one would really have to see all of his films. Yet some strong patterns emerge even in the few films that have reached this country.

Many of Saura's films focus on childhood. In his first feature *Los Golfos* (*The Urchins*), 1959, the first Spanish film to be shot entirely on location, he used a neorealist style to document a group of impoverished young delinquents who are trying to get the money for one of them to become a bullfighter, which they see as the only way for them to achieve success in their society; the release of the film was held up until 1962. Perhaps as with their later choice of a nonlinear structure, Saura and some of his compatriots began focusing on youth as a means of getting political commentary past the censors, who have persistently plagued them. For example, from Saura's second film *Llanto por un Bandido* (*Lament for a Bandit*), 1963, which portrayed the life of an Andalusian outlaw, government censors cut many scenes, including one in which Buñuel plays a hangman. In *The Hunt*, which deals with a hunting trip taken by three friends who earlier had fought on the winning side of the Civil War, Saura was prevented from mentioning any political events. When *The Garden of Delights* was first shown in Spain, five out of ten reels were re-edited and the release was delayed. The subtle critical commentary on the Falange in *Cousin Angelica* evoked a bombing incident in Barcelona, thefts of prints, threats against projectionists, and vandalism against theaters—the same kind of behavior that was portrayed in Gutierrez's *Black Brood*, which was banned in Spain and refused official permission for foreign distribution. Even in this open attack against Francoism, Gutierrez focuses on a young individual as he develops from a sensitive young boy into a brutal killer within the bosom of his fanatic Falangist family. Gutierrez's portrait of the making of a Fascist belongs with Malle's *Lacombe, Lucien*, Bertolucci's *The Conformist*, and Visconti's *The Damned*.

In contrast to these operatic films with their dramatic sweep of violent deeds and historical events, Saura's later works are more interior and subtle. They focus more narrowly on an individual within the close confines of a bourgeois family and stress the mental life of a particular con-

sciousness—memories, dreams and fantasies—rather than external events. After making *Elisa, Vida Mia*, Saura observed in an interview: “My belief is that those who pretend that art can solve social problems make the mistake of forgetting that normally the artist is a victim of society. I find it absurd when I see those who claim a political aim in the arts rebuking artists for not fulfilling their duties as good citizens. Of course, the first thing should be to agree on what is a truly political attitude; for me a labor dispute is no more political than the difficulties two people face to go on living together.”

Saura's primary focus is the crippling influence of social and political forces on individuals, particularly during childhood, which is revealed through a return to the past or a reunion with family. Like Chevarri's *To an Unknown God* (the most perceptive portrait of a male homosexual I have seen on film) and Erice's *Spirit of the Beehive* (also featuring a brilliant performance by the young Ana Torrent, who stars in *Cría Cuervos*), Saura's films achieve extraordinary subtlety in their psychological realism. He makes unusual demands on his actors, whose facial expressions and physical gestures must simultaneously convey both the masks required by the society and the underlying passions and ambivalences. Saura's films are masterpieces of repression in which the subtext is developed, not with the surreal wit or grotesquery of a Buñuel, but with the emotional intensity and psychological astuteness of a Bergman. As in Bergman's canon, Saura's films are woven together by recurring names, faces, characters, and situations that suggest a tapestry of recurring dreams.

Within his repressive society, Saura valiantly tried to approximate the artistic freedom of an *auteur* like Bergman, but it took him time to develop such an approach. “My first film *The Urchins* was very much like a documentary. It was a very interesting experience, but I was much more interested in making fictional movies that required more invention. *Lament for a Bandit* was all laid out beforehand like a typical Spanish film. The final product was not what I wanted; I considered it a personal failure. After this film, I made an absolute decision to work another way—to work slowly, to work only on projects

that excited me, and not to make any concessions.” (I)

He realized that his problems with *Lament for a Bandit* were partly caused by the large budget. “We were trying to approximate the American way of making a film. From that point I decided to make films only that I could control completely, with fewer characters and thus less expensive. Gradually, a crew was formed and always with the same producer. The same was true of the actors; it's easier to work with actors you know because you start out with a basic knowledge of what you have already done, and then take off from there. From *The Hunt* on, I have worked in this way.” (S)

Since 1965, Saura's producer has been Elías Querejeta, who has given him total artistic freedom. “Querejeta is a very intelligent and dynamic man. He has never behaved like a producer. He always asks me—what do you want to do? Can it be done economically or not? Then he never says anything more until the movie is finished. During the years under Franco, there were many difficult times because of censorship. Several movies were banned—a few of mine, a few by others. Everybody was affected, and Elías was always very supportive despite the fact that sometimes he was close to bankruptcy. Gradually, the movies we made have been accepted and therefore he has recovered financially. This has enabled Elías to produce more movies with other young directors. At this moment, I think he is one of the most interesting independent producers in the world—not just because he is my friend, but because he really is!” (I)

Despite the fact that all of his films since *Peppermint Frappé* (1967) have complex non-linear structures, Saura has chosen the unconventional technique of shooting every film in the sequence it appears on the screen. “This decision to work chronologically is related to my previous decision because in order to do what I really want to, I need two things—total freedom of movement and the possibility of modifying things in relation to what's previously been done.” (I) His films are never tightly scripted (“The script is only the basis from which I start creating”) so there is always ample room for improvisation. “Everyone knows that a film starts with the

first image and ends with the last one. But for a film director, or at least for me, a movie starts when I begin working on it and ends when I quit. During this long process, there are ideas that I have at home that change substantially once I try to shoot them. It's more exciting doing it this way—for the director, the actors, and the crew—because the film is truly born through the collaboration and this evolution is parallel for the actors, the crew, and myself. It is very exciting to watch the transformation in the psychology of the actors, the lighting, the montage, and in all of the elements that go into the shooting of the movie." (I)

This method of shooting in sequence is related to Saura's thematic focus on the development of an individual consciousness, in which a particular set of events result in his protagonist's unique bent of mind, which is a reflection of his own. "Every film is a unique experience. It's not transferable in time and space. I can't separate it from my own life because what I'm doing is what I want to do." (S) Saura uses this same sequential method in developing his canon; it is impossible to imagine him working on several projects simultaneously like an Altman or a Godard. "Every film is a consequence of the film before it. Only when a film is completed, do I feel the necessity of starting the next one." (S)

## THE GARDEN OF DELIGHTS

Of all Saura's works, *The Garden of Delights* is the closest to Buñuel in its use of surreal symbolism; it depicts the discreet horrors of the bourgeoisie living under Franco repression. In tracing the mutual destructiveness of a powerful industrialist and his family of decadent pleasure-seekers, the film also evokes the grotesqueries of the Bosch painting (one of the prize treasures of the Prado) from which it derives its title. Interestingly, Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes (who is a close friend of Saura's) also absorbs this painting to portray an imagination perverted by the Spanish Inquisition in his masterful *Terra Nostra*, the foreword of which acknowledges both Saura and Buñuel. Saura claims it is not a matter of influence among Fuentes, Buñuel, and himself or the fact that they are friends, but rather that they are all products of the same Hispanic cul-

ture. Their shared concern with the dialectic between daydream and material reality, myth and history, fantasy and satire, comes not from Freud and Marx or Anglo-Saxon tradition, but from Cervantes, Calderón, and Catholicism; and it can also be found in other contemporary Latin American writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, and Manuel Puig. "There is a very strong imaginative force in our Hispanic culture, which is absolutely original. It has nothing to do with the Anglo-Saxon culture or any other. Unfortunately the dominant culture in the world today is the Anglo-Saxon—economically and culturally, their pressure is very strong. But I think for a number of years the Latin American countries have been conscious of the originality of their culture. That's why, for example, Gabriel García Márquez is so wonderful. He realizes that this imaginative potential can be a way of seeing life differently from the way it is perceived by the pragmatic Anglo-Saxon culture." (I)

One of the assumptions that these artists share in common and that is powerfully demonstrated in Saura's *Garden of Delights* is that by fully probing the fantasies of individuals, it is possible to perceive an entire culture and to demystify political dynamics. Antonio Cano, the rich protagonist in *The Garden of Delights* (brilliantly played by José Luis López Vázquez) is crippled in an auto accident, which confines him to a wheel chair and forces him to return to the role of a helpless child. Suffering massive brain damage, he is partially paralyzed, his speech is seriously impaired, and his memory half gone. By choosing such a character to control the film's point of view, Saura makes the gap between inner life and outward behavior essential to the plot and dramatizes quite literally the crippling influence of Spanish society on an individual consciousness. The film suggests that this destructive influence has been operating, not just in the accident, but all of Antonio's life. The accident merely confirms what was already true—his emotional, mental, and spiritual deterioration.

The film opens with a brilliant, theatrical sequence in which a striking woman costumes herself to resemble a lady in an old photograph. She is directed by the man who also appears in this picture. Now grown old, he uses make-up to

## CARLOS SAURA

impersonate his younger self. Then a huge squealing pig is carried into an elegant bedroom, where the stage is set for the entrance of the crippled Antonio, who is to be both the star performer and audience in this family melodrama. Later, we discover that this bizarre scene has been staged by Antonio's father as a means of restoring his son's memory so that he can tell them the number of a Swiss bank account that contains most of the family fortune. He has chosen this particular scene because it re-enacts a terrifying trauma in which the five-year-old Antonio was punished by being locked in a room and told that an animal would devour his hands. Before we understand the context, this sequence evokes Buñuel's surreal trickery of putting animals in elegant settings (e.g., the dead donkey in *Un Chien Andalou*, the oxen in *L'Age d'Or*, the bear and sheep in *Exterminating Angel*, and the ostrich and cock in *The Phantom of Liberty*). Yet, when we understand what is happening, it arouses the kind of emotional intensity that Bergman achieves in *Hour of the Wolf* with the nightmarish account of a similar childhood punishment also involving castration anxiety and guilt—a boy is locked in a closet, which he is told contains an evil little man who will bite off his toes.

Saura is masterful in controlling the modulation of tone between the bitter satire, which is sometimes comic or absurd, and the psychological reality of the emotional pain. For example, in the sequence where Antonio's neglected wife tries to re-enact their first love scene in a boat on an idyllic lake, the replay almost turns into a parody of *An American Tragedy*; yet, the yearnings of this woman are still poignant, and the economic basis of the rejection is still underscored.

The film implies that all members of the family and of the society have suffered the same psychic damage as Antonio. This symbolic point is rendered concretely in the final powerful fantasy where each member of the family is isolated in a wheel chair, rolling across an elegant lawn like crippled performers in a perverted minuet.

## COUSIN ANGELICA

In *Cousin Angelica* there is a shift from blatant symbolism to a more subtle personal expression; the crippling of consciousness is neither so literal



In *COUSIN ANGELICA*, Luis (José Luis López Vázquez) relives his childhood—but his image remains adult.

nor so melodramatic, and the boundaries between inner life and outer events are more obscure. The story follows the outer and inner journey of Luis Cano (again played by Vázquez), a quiet, lonely, middle-aged bachelor, who comes to bury the bones of his mother, who has been dead for 20 years. He visits his aunt Pilar, whom he lived with 30 years ago during the Civil War, and his cousin Angelica, whom he loved as a child, and relives moments from his childhood, which was shaped by the war that bitterly split his family in two and separated him from his parents.

*Cousin Angelica* is Saura's first autobiographical film. "In my other films, there are autobiographical parts, but this is the first film I've made in which I've tried to reflect my own life. During my childhood the Civil War had a tremendous impact on me, which is reflected in my movie." (S) When asked why he chose to portray a Francoist family rather than the other side, he

replied: "Because that was my experience—my mother's family was pro-Franco." (S) Luis is called "the black sheep of the family" and apparently sympathizes with his father's anti-Franco views; hence, this is actually Saura's first film to focus on those who lost the war. The film is dedicated to his in-laws Oona and Charlie Chaplin, whose political loyalties are well known, and whom he chose as a new family allegiance. María Clara Fernández de Loayza, the actress he selected to play the young Angelica (like Ana Torrent who stars in *Cría Cuervos*), will probably grow up to resemble his wife Geraldine Chaplin. Saura does not feel compelled to represent the events of his life as they actually occurred. "I don't like autobiographies that are like diaries. What interests me is the imagination working on one's own life—naturally, this offers a wide leeway for creation." (I) This is precisely the focus of the film—Luis's imaginative recreation of childhood memories.

Like other artists who dramatize the development of consciousness (Bergman, James, Proust), Saura bases his creation on germinal sensory images. This process is explicitly described in one scene where Luis remarks, "One day Proust dipped a madeleine in his tea and his mouth was full of the smell of his grandmother's garden." This associative process of drawing a story out of rich, concrete images controls both Saura's creative method and the film's narrative structure. "The mechanisms of memory are different in every person. One day I looked in the mirror and said, 'My goodness, what did I look like as a child?' I can't remember myself as a child in the mirror. I have photographs, but when I look at them, I feel it's someone I don't know. When I've tried to reconstruct my past, I don't do so with the mentality of a child. Mostly I see myself as I am now, but going back 20 or 30 years. That was one of the fundamental ideas that made me make this film—that you cannot see yourself as a child." (S)

The film is controlled by this idea, for the adult Luis appears in all of his childhood memories; we never see him as a child. This puts extraordinary demands on Vázquez, who is able to express the childhood perspective through subtle changes in his facial expressions and body pos-

tures and by enlarging his eyes. After a while, we actually see the child in *Luis*, regardless of his external setting. We gradually understand that although Luis has come to bury his past, it is much more alive for him than the present and that his inner life is much more engaging than external events. This helps us to understand why he rejects Angelica as a woman and is much more attracted to her nine-year-old daughter. While he claims that being single means he is "free but alone," we see that he is actually bound to the ghosts from his past.

Yet like Saura, Luis is free to alter his memories, sometimes casting them with characters from his immediate environment. For example, Angelica's affable, unfaithful husband Anselmo is cast in the role of her tyrannical Francoist father, who came between the young lovers. Luis insists they look alike, even when Angelica shows him old photographs of her father to prove the contrary. Sometimes Luis's distortions are humorous—as when he pictures Angelica's father with his arm in a cast; although his uncle claims to have been wounded by shrapnel, it looks more like his arm was paralyzed in a fascist salute. Saura suggests that not only is our present determined by our past, but our past is reshaped by the present. The mediator is the individual consciousness.

The film opens with a powerful germinal image. As we hear choir boys singing, we see white mist drifting through a church schoolroom, which is illuminated by strange overexposed lighting; the camera slowly glides through wreckage, observing signs of violence from some unknown disaster. We do not yet know what happened, nor do we recognize the mode of reality—present event, nightmare, or memory. Yet the image immediately engages our attention and opens the door to Luis's consciousness. "The mechanics of the mind are very complicated. What we call reality may be everyday life, dreams, memories, obsessions. That's the material I like to work with. I try to find a luminous window or open door to this kind of reality." (S)

Later in the film, when we return to this image, we realize it was a childhood memory of a traumatic incident in which Luis's school was bombed. In order to understand its full impact, we must



learn what other memories it is associated with in Luis's mind. For example, he links it with the death of an 11-year-old boy, who was killed by a bomb while playing in a school courtyard, for his priest uses this as a moral exemplum to instill the fear of sin and death in the minds of Luis and his classmates. The association between religion, death, and guilt is also strong in the memory of a theatrical performance of Christ's crucifixion, where Luis, who plays a Roman guard, is tempted to flirt with Angelica. In another memory, a priest berates him when he refuses to confess any improper sexual contact with his cousin. When Luis and his family visit a nun with bandaged hands, who offers her self-inflicted wounds to compensate for wartime suffering, he confuses her with the "stigmatized nun," who is the subject of a painting that hangs in his bedroom, which triggers a terrifying childhood nightmare. As soon as the bandaged sister criticizes his father's politics, which is intended to arouse Luis's guilt, he sees a cancerous worm crawling out of her breast as in the painting and his nightmare. All of these memories reveal that, like the War, the Catholic Church effectively cripples the young with guilt and fear, inhibiting their enjoyment of sensual pleasures and stifling any rebellious political consciousness.

The other primary source of imprinting in Luis's childhood is art. While in many of his memories it is controlled by the Church (e.g., the religious pageant is evoked by music, the nightmare by the religious painting), the secular art is also powerful: Luis still hears Aunt Pilar's piano long after she has given up playing, and the adult Angelica still can recite the love poem that the young Luis stole from Antonio Machado. One of Luis's most vivid memories is of a wartime documentary called *The Eyes of London*, which showed "blue eyes everywhere!" When we actually see the film played back in his mind, we discover it is in black and white. The eyes are covered with dehumanized goggles and belong to uniformed men who move like mannequins through wartime rubble. The human eyes are visible only in the final shot, when one of the ominous figures removes his goggles. These images are based on Saura's own memories, which, like Luis's, are drastically altered. "*The Eyes of London* is a movie I saw in school when I was a child. I was very impressed by it, but I have transformed the images in *Cousin Angelica* and have created an entirely different film from that memory." (1)

The opening sequence of the bombing is followed by a scene in which Luis receives his mother's bones, which he locks in the trunk of

COUSIN  
ANGELICA



his car. Now we recognize the present encounter with death that triggers the terrifying memory. As we watch Luis driving along a desolate road that leads to the city where he spent his youth, we also follow his train of thought. When he stops on the road, he sees an old car from the thirties containing his parents, who approach him to say farewell. These voices from the past speak the first dialogue of the film. Though we hear Luis answer, at first his lips don't move; but as he becomes more absorbed in reliving this moment, he says aloud to his mother, with full conviction and feeling, "I want to be with you." Like the bombing incident, this memory recurs later in the film. After remembering a childhood fantasy in which he had imagined his father's execution, Luis returns to this roadside memory. But in this version, he is split in two: as he drives in the car, he sees himself talking with his parents on the road, which literally turns him around. Like a Prufrock, the "you and I" of Luis are embarked on a strange mental journey, with "a hundred visions and revisions" that keep him from fully engaging in the present. The first roadside fantasy is interrupted by the germinal image that is central to Saura's creation of the film—the aging Luis staring into a mirror as he shaves, unable to see himself as a child.

At the end of his visit, after he has rejected his cousin's sexual advances and decided to return to Barcelona, Luis borrows her daughter's bicycle and takes one last short trip into the past. It is the traumatic incident in which the war forever separated him from his cousin Angelica. The

young lovers flee on a bicycle to Madrid, where they plan to be reunited with his parents. But they are stopped on the road by Francoist soldiers, who return them to her angry father. As he beats the cringing Luis with his leather belt, the uncle becomes the living embodiment of Fascist tyranny; no wonder his image is so easily blurred in Luis's mind with that of Angelica's husband. While Luis is being punished, Angelica sits in the next room, tearfully listening to his sobs as her mother tries to soothe her by brushing her hair; on the sound track, Imperio Argentina sings *Ricío*. Like Romeo and Juliet, these war-crossed lovers are destroyed—not physically, but psychically: she will be trapped in a boring conventional marriage, and he will be doomed to solitude. This separation repeats what already happened in the previous generation between Luis's father and his aunt Pilar. When the lonely old lady bids farewell to her nephew, she says, "Tell your father that . . . no, nothing." For the same reasons, Luis really has nothing to say to his cousin Angelica.

## CRÍA CUERVOS (RAISE RAVENS)

"The last image in *Cousin Angelica*—the mother combing the daughter's hair—is the opening of *Cría Cuervos*." (S) The first Saura film to be based on a script he wrote entirely alone, *Cría Cuervos*—its creation, its narrative structure, and its center of consciousness—grow out of this opening germinal image: the hair of the nine-year-old Ana (brilliantly played by Ana Torrent) is lovingly groomed by her mother (Geraldine Chaplin). We do not yet realize that Ana's mother is dead and that this ordinary domestic ritual is actually an obsessive fantasy of the child, whose emotional life has been shaped by the loss of her mother. When we discover that Geraldine Chaplin also plays the adult Ana, who in 1995 is looking back on her childhood (set in Madrid in 1975), we realize that the image may reflect the reworked memory of the woman rather than the girl. We wonder whether she has substituted her own image for that of her mother (just as she has been forced to replace her with her own fantasy creations), or whether she has modelled herself after her mother's image, which Ana now embodies. In either case, it is the child's consciousness that dominates both the central char-

COUSIN ANGELICA



## CARLOS SAURA

acter and the film. Reversing the central premise of *Cousin Angelica*, *Cria Cuervos* raises the question of what happens when you *can* see yourself as a child. An old Spanish proverb warns, "Raise ravens and they'll peck out your eyes."

This film presents the best portrayal of a child I have ever seen. Saura has observed: "I have never believed in the child's paradise. On the contrary, I think that childhood is a stage where nocturnal terror, fear of the unknown, loneliness, are present with at least the same intensity as the joy of living and that curiosity of which pedagogues talk so much."<sup>3</sup> The intensity of Ana's passions is made so credible that, without any melodrama, we can accept a nine-year-old contemplating suicide and poisoning one of her family elders. Her interior fantasy life is so vivid that when she awakens from a nightmare and discovers her mother's phantom has fled, without any sentimentality, we can identify with her panic and terror and her desperate longing for her mother. The child's perception of adult realities (e.g., her father's sexual adventures, which lead to his fatal heart attack, and his mistreatment of her mother, which is partly responsible for her death) is so convincing because, without fully comprehending all of the events, she intuitively grasps the emotional reality. Through her eyes, we are able to see the adults with a double perspective that may also partially reflect the adult Ana's consciousness. For example, although we sympathize with Aunt Paulina in her frustrating romance with a married man and admire her conscientious efforts to raise Ana and her two sisters, we still understand why the young Ana hates her. Aunt Paulina is not loving like Ana's mother, especially when she imposes tyrannical rules on the children. Like Luis's Aunt Pilar in *Cousin Angelica*, despite her kindness and genuine warmth, she can never fully replace the absent mother, whose memory is forever locked in the heart of her child. As Ana's ancient grandmother sits in her wheelchair—paralyzed, mute, and expressionless—staring at yellowed photographs and listening to old phonograph records, we realize that her mind is totally absorbed in the past and that for her the present is dead. The young Ana feels great pity for this old woman, whom she would like to put out of her misery; as an adult, Ana will identify with this total immersion in memo-



CRIA CUERVOS: (top) the exterior "normal" life of Ana; and (bottom) the fantasy life.

ries. The grandmother evokes a remembrance of things past—not only of a Spain before Franco, but also of Antonio in Saura's own *Garden of Delights*.

Despite this intense inner life, on the surface Ana appears to be a "normal" nine-year-old, particularly when she and her older sister dance to pop records and dress up like women. In these scenes, Saura carefully avoids cuteness and sentimentality; he uses these potential clichés to enlarge the range of Ana's fantasy life. In the final scene, we watch the two girls running to school, performing another ordinary domestic ritual as in the opening image. Yet, again, the fantasy

world dominates. The sister describes to Ana a powerful dream she had the night before, which suggests that, if she had been the central consciousness of the film, the emotional content might have been equally as intense. Saura says that the actress who played the sister actually had this dream the night before they shot the scene. His decision to include it in the film broadens the scope of this personal work by suggesting that if one probed deeply enough, one would perhaps discover such sensitivity and pain in everyone—even in the most complacent, privileged bourgeoisie. Though the repressive Francoist society is still portrayed as shaping the individual consciousness of the protagonist—particularly through the self-centered domination of a militaristic father and the oppressive atmosphere of a rich, conservative family controlled by restrictive social and religious conventions—the social forces are further in the background than in previous Saura films. Although *Cría Cuervos* was shot while Franco was still alive, it already reveals Saura's movement toward a more personal cinema.

## The Future

Since we have not yet seen any of Saura's films made after the death of Franco, it is difficult to determine whether his cinema will actually become more personal or more political. *Elisa, Vida Mia* tells the story of Luis (Fernando Rey), a 60-year-old writer living in seclusion, who is visited by his daughter Elisa (Geraldine Chaplin) whom he hasn't seen for 20 years. He incorporates their conversations into his writings until the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred. Saura describes the film as the story of two

human beings finding each other again, "but also of many other things like, for instance, the father's gradual domination of his daughter as they interchange experiences and secrets. It could also be the story of a marriage which ends and another which starts, or a film about solitude, failure, death. Or even a reflection on the differences between literature and cinema."

*Blindfolded Eyes* is a love story about an acting teacher named Luis (José Luis Gómez) and an actress named Emilia (Geraldine Chaplin), whom he is directing in a role based on an actual woman he has heard giving testimony on how she was tortured. The film is based on an experience Saura had in May 1977 when he was participating in a symposium in Madrid on repression and torture in Latin America. "Above all, I was impressed by the declarations of a woman who started telling us with a total lack of emotion, . . . and in an unmistakable Argentine accent, the way she had been tortured . . . Those of us who were part of the presiding table, the testifying lawyers and the woman expounding her terrifying experiences with torture, were on the stage of a theater, each one of us performing the role that had been assigned to us in a play called *The Blindfolded Eyes* . . . In my double role as both actor and spectator, I observed the young audience that listened with great attention to the actress-witness. Suddenly, a couple of young boys armed with machine guns rose from the floor and started shooting at us. And why not? The brutal killing of five labor lawyers in Atocha street in Madrid had only recently happened, and it was at that time that a series of organized groups were trying to create an atmosphere of terror in the city."<sup>4</sup>

Although highly self-reflexive like *Elisa, Vida Mia*, *Blindfolded Eyes* is more direct in expressing Saura's anger over political events. "Perhaps in *Blindfolded Eyes* this anger that I feel is made more clear than in any other of my movies due to the subject I have chosen for the film. But beyond the reality of torture, unfortunately proved in most of those countries that call themselves civilized, what I would have liked to make clear in *Blindfolded Eyes* is the fact that, almost without realizing it, we live in a world dominated by a violence which is at times visible and at times hidden, and which is restricting our freedom."



## CARLOS SAURA

Currently Saura is working on a project that will be a continuation of *Ana and the Wolves*, 1972. Although it was made between *The Garden of Delights* and *Cousin Angelica*, this film has never been released in the US. "Of course, if you haven't seen *Ana and the Wolves*, it's difficult to talk about my new project. The earlier film is about a rich Spanish family that lives in a large house on the outskirts of a city. Geraldine Chaplin plays a British girl who comes to the house. The movie deals with the relationship between this girl and the family, which contain all the Spanish prototypes—a mystic, a military man, etc. It's rather metaphorical, like a political allegory. The whole situation is controlled by a mother figure. My new film is *Mama Cumple Cien Años* (*Mother Reaches 100*). It takes place 15 years later when the British girl returns to the house and finds the children are now men and women and that everyone in the family has been transformed by the cultural and political changes." (1)

Although like *Blindfolded Eyes* this film promises to deal more centrally with political issues than *Cría Cuervos* and *Elisa, Vida Mía*, they will once again be filtered through the consciousness



Geraldine Chaplin in *BLINDFOLDED EYES*

of an individual. Saura insists, "I have always been interested more in the individual than in society." (1)

## NOTES

1. Most of the quotations from Saura are based on two sources: his remarks following the UNESCO screening of *Cousin Angelica*, August 19, 1978, translated into English by Geraldine Chaplin; and an interview I conducted with him on August 20th, in which Nicolas Bautista did the translating. These sources are indicated in the text by S and I respectively.

2. Other participants were: Lindsay Anderson (England), Alfonso Arau (Mexico), Michael Cacoyannis (Greece), Youssef Chahine (Egypt), André Delvaux (Belgium), Susumu Hani (Japan), Claude Jutra (Canada), Janusz Majewski (Poland), Ousmane Sembene (Senegal), Mrinal Sen (India), Agnes Varda (France), and Nelson Pereira dos Santos (Brazil). US film-making was represented by Robert Aldrich, Jan Kadar (although Czechoslovakian, he was the 1975 AFI Film-maker in Residence), Rouben Mamoulian, Alan Pakula, and King Vidor.

3. From an interview between Carlos Saura and Angel S. Harguindeguy for the book *Cría Cuervos*, edited by Elías Querejeta.

4. This and the following quote are extracts from another interview between Carlos Saura and Angel S. Harguindeguy.

## FILMOGRAPHY

Works made while a student at the Film School in Madrid (which Saura entered in 1953):

- 1955 *Antonio Saura*
- 1957 *La Tarde de Domingo* (*Sunday Afternoon*)
- 1958 *Cuenca*

### Features:

- 1959 *Los Golfos* (*The Urchins*)
- 1963 *Llanto por un Bandido* (*Lament for a Bandit*)
- 1965 *La Caza* (*The Hunt*)
- 1967 *Peppermint Frappé*
- 1968 *Stress es Tres, Tres* (*Stress is Three, Three*)
- 1969 *La Madriguera* (*The Honeycomb*)
- 1970 *El Jardín de los Delicias* (*The Garden of Delights*)
- 1972 *Ana y los Lobos* (*Ana and the Wolves*)
- 1973 *La Prima Angélica* (*Cousin Angelica*)
- 1975 *Cría Cuervos* (*Raise Ravens*)
- 1977 *Elisa, Vida Mía* (*Elisa, My Life*)
- 1978 *Los Ojos Vendados* (*Blindfolded Eyes*)

### Work in Progress:

- Mama Cumple Cien Años* (*Mama Reaches 100*)